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THE COURSE OF STUDY

A PUBLICATION FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS

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Suggestions as to the Study of Psychology

Francis W. Parker

I.

The mastery of a science depends upon a thorough study of the elementary steps that lead up to the laws and principles of that science. *The elementary study of a science demands a long, thorough, and direct examination, by observation, experiment, and investigation of the things intrinsic to that science.* For this indispensable work there can be no substitute. The common failure to comprehend a science is due to lack of preliminary work.

In the first steps a science text-book can be used pedagogically only as a guide to economical investigation, for the statements and discussions of even the best text-book outrun the experience of students, making personal verification impossible, thus confusing and losing the student in a multiplicity of incomprehensible statements. The common refuge is word-memorizing and a vain conceit of knowledge.

II.

The elementary study of psychology demands unequivocally the most careful, thorough, prolonged concentration of the will upon the things (of consciousness) intrinsic to a knowledge of one's own mind.

III.

Every human being has ever with him a perfect laboratory, a stream of thought, containing as its substantial current a constant succession of images. How to study this personal "stream of thought" in successive states of consciousness is the fundamental problem of psychological knowledge. Patience and perseverance to fix the mind on that which seems simple, and moving gradually, through an understanding of the plainest acts of consciousness, up the scale to higher problems, are the inner secrets of successful study.

IV.

The initial, and indeed the main, difficulty in the study of psychology is the strong habit—no doubt springing from instinct—of *thinking in terms of objects external to the mind.* Slight reflection is sufficient to convince any one that there is nothing material in consciousness; that no material object can be in the mind; and that, indeed, not even the thoughts of others can be in my mind. When I see an object—a tree, flower, house, for instance—it (the object) is not in the contents of my consciousness. But something is there, and that *something* in some way corresponds to the external object which "I see." The things intrinsic to a knowledge of psychology are in one's own consciousness, and must be studied there. External objects, of sight, sound, touch, etc., are outside the mind, and are the external causes of internal or conscious effects.

V.

The separation, in thought, of consciousness from all externalities, either material or in the minds of others, is absolutely necessary to anything like a profitable study of psychology. The proof of this separation is clear and convincing, but the habit of thinking in terms of things external to one's own mind is exceedingly difficult to to overcome. Experience shows that persons who have really studied, and in part mastered, other subjects are prepared to enter into the problems of psychology, but those—and there are many—who have never really studied any other science are very poorly prepared for this new subject.

VI.

In the direct study of one's own conscious acts and states there is one inherent difficulty — the stream of thought flows on with extreme rapidity — one image goes, another comes—while external objects appear to be somewhat stationary.

Drawing inferences without requisite data is a common fault in the study of psychology, as in other subjects. Long, careful, all-sided investigation should always precede even a tentative inference.

VII.

One very common vagary is to be noted —that of discussing the exceptions before the rule is understood. Instead of investigating the plainest facts the student often glides into the most abstruse questions, as if controlled by the riddle instinct; for instance, he will concern himself with the problem of automatism before understanding acts that are plainly not automatic.

VIII.

A good working knowledge of the relations of consciousness to the brain and nerve system is indispensable to the study of psychology. It is, however, by no means a preliminary study. Physiological psychology proposes to explain the physical causes of mental effects, while it is evident that effects should be studied before causes. When a student discovers his own images and imaging power, he becomes eager to learn the physical causes of consciousness.

IX.

Exercises are here suggested which may enable the student to separate, in thought, his acts of consciousness from all other things. Fully *realize* the truth of the sentences by steadily holding in consciousness the thought expressed:

1. I am conscious.
2. I am now conscious of something: *See, hear, touch, read.*
3. That something of which I am conscious is in my consciousness.
4. That something which is in my consciousness is not outside of my consciousness.
5. Nothing external to my consciousness is ever in my consciousness.
6. Nothing material is in my consciousness. That which is in my consciousness has no length, breadth, or thickness; it does not occupy space; it has no weight.
7. I am conscious only of that which is in my consciousness.
8. I *know* things outside of my consciousness, but I am not conscious of them. I know things outside of my consciousness, because I have things in my consciousness which I believe correspond to external things.
9. If I would know my mind, I must study the things in my consciousness, separated from all other things.

X.

Reminiscences. Recall many things that have happened to you personally.

1. Think of the house in which you were born, or one in which you lived in early

life. Hold the image that comes first steadily in your consciousness. Note what comes in. How long can you hold this image or these images? What comes in besides images, i. e., things that correspond to external objects?

2. Recall a vacation in the country that you have had; the landscapes, houses, experiences. Hold one landscape steadily in mind. What happens in your consciousness? What comes in besides things that correspond to external objects?

3. Recall your first day in school. The first party you ever attended. Some accident. A trip on the cars. A voyage, if you have made one.

These are suggestions of thousands of recollections. It would be a good plan to recall your entire life from the earliest recollections.

What inferences can you make? In all your reminiscences there are no objects before you (acting upon your mind), but you have things in your consciousness. What besides images? What is the limit of your recollections? If you cannot recall images of an event, what can you recall?

XI.

IMAGING. What mental action precedes the doing of any work?

Make a large number of experiments in this direction and note what happens in consciousness. Plan (1) a dress that you propose to make, (2) a dwelling-house in which you would like to live, (3) a dinner that you propose to get, (4) a garden, (5) some article that you propose to make in sloyd. These are merely suggestions of countless things that you may plan.

Do you ever plan any work without first imaging what you propose to do?

DESCRIPTION. Describe objects to others by speaking or writing. What is the mental process? Tell a story. What is the mental action before you tell the story, or while you are telling it? What must you have in your mind before you are able to tell a story or describe an object? Converse with others. What must you have in consciousness when you describe anything?

XII.

HEARING LANGUAGE. What goes on in consciousness when you are hearing language? Get some one to pronounce words to you, the names of objects, one after the other; for instance, house, fence, trees, street, river, canal, bicycle, horse, dog, etc. What happens in consciousness?

Have words pronounced that do not directly recall images. What words do recall images directly and what words do not? What is the function of words that do not recall images? Get some one to tell you a story. Recall it and tell it to some one else.

What is the mental process of hearing language? What happens in consciousness when you fail to understand a word? What happens when you do not know the meaning of a word?

XIII.

READING. Ascertain by many experiments what the mental process of reading is. Get some one to write words on the blackboard for you. Shut your eyes while the words are being written. Open them, and see what the effect of the words is upon you. The first words written should be nouns; for instance, goose, hen, pig, cow, house, etc.

A part of speech has a particular mental function.

Ascertain by experiment what the mental functions of different parts of speech are. Begin with verbs, followed by adjectives, conjunctions, prepositions, adverbs, etc.

It would be very profitable to take the parts of speech one after the other and get at the psychological function of each part.

What parts of speech arouse images directly? What parts of speech do not arouse images directly? What is the function of words that do not arouse images directly?

[NOTE: It will be readily understood that language should arouse *like thoughts* in the minds of all who hear or read language. A word like "run" or "walk" may indirectly recall images, but it will act in an entirely different way on the minds of the different hearers. One might think of a man walking, another of a cow, and another of a horse.]

What is the mental function of a word? of a sentence? Analyze the sentence in its relation to your consciousness, and tell what each word does for a conscious state.

Read a story and then recall it. Reflect on it. What do you recall?

Recall stories that you have read in the past.

What goes on in consciousness while reading?

What is the difference between study of text and reading? Try a number of experiments. Why is study more profitable than reading?

What discoveries in regard to your own consciousness have you made?

(*To be continued.*)

Social Occupations and History

Emily J. Rice

Investigations in all parts of the country in regard to history in elementary schools show that there is very little work in this subject below the two highest grades. In these grades, American history receives some attention with a view to the cultivation of patriotism, a purpose almost uniformly assigned. It is evident that parents and educators believe that study of American institutions will help the future citizen to fulfill his obligations toward the government; that, somehow, knowledge that can find no immediate expression in action will be transmuted, long afterward, into good citizenship. They see no serious mission for history until the children are old enough to take an interest in political affairs. Consequently, only in connection with this one institution of government is any attempt made to give our children a feeling of their social obligations.

This view of the educative value of history fails in the first requisite for successful teaching. The interests of the children in the elementary schools are not primarily, even in the two highest grades, in political and governmental conditions. They are rather in the social life and occupations of people, in industries. Fortunately, such occupations are finding an entrance into the curriculum. Whereas the school has been regarded in the past as a place where certain things were to be learned, it is now considered as an organization for social work. Cooking, sewing, and manual training may be grudgingly introduced as extra studies, yet there is no doubt that more and more the school will reflect the varied activities of the outside world.

These social occupations are a foundation for the only study of history which the children of the elementary schools can use in any vital way. A great field is here open for the teacher of history to unite the head and hand work, to throw the light of the race experience and the ideals of its literature upon the actual life of the children. The schools are in danger of allow-